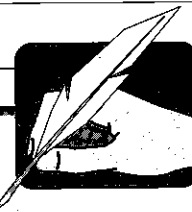


## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY



## A Bleak Future for Freedmen

In a letter to the editor published in the November 29, 1865, issue of *Weekly Anglo-African*, Samuel Childress, a former slave in Nashville, expressed his opinions about presidential Reconstruction.

*As you read, think about the problems confronting formerly enslaved people.*

Mr. Editor:

You desire to know our opinions respecting the policy of the President concerning the colored race. We are not acquainted with the whole of it—we do not feel confident to advise the President, nevertheless we cannot avoid having impressions of some sort respecting some things which have been done, and some things which have been left undone. To us the prospect seems gloomy. We have no permanent homes, and we see no prospect of getting any.

Most of us are accustomed to farm labor, and whatever skill we possess is chiefly in that direction. Land is dear, and few of us are able to buy it. We can hire out to our former masters, it may be said. It is true that we can do so to a considerate extent; but it is well known that the temper of our former masters has not greatly improved toward us.

Is it the intention of the Government to drive us to our worst enemies to ask for work, and that too upon the very soil which has been forfeited by the treason of the pretended owner? Our race has tilled this land for ages; whatever wealth has been accumulated in the South has been acquired mainly by our labor. The profits of it have gone to increase the pride and wickedness of our old masters, while we have been left in ignorance and degradation; all this oppression and wrong were

committed under the United States Government, which stood ready with loaded guns and fixed bayonets to strike us down if we resisted our masters.

The small oppressor was the State; the great oppressor was the United States. When the nation conquered the rebels, the property of the latter was forfeited to the Government. . . .

It cannot be denied that the colored race earned nearly all this property. The United States, as High Sheriff of the Court of Heaven, held it in its hand, and could do with it what it pleased. Justice required that it should be paid over to the colored race who had been robbed of it. But what did it do with it? Let the Proclamations and pardons of the Government answer. It has gone back again to the very men whose hands are dripping with the blood of murdered prisoners, and whose cruelties cry to heaven for vengeance.

It would seem that it was regarded as a greater crime to be black than to be a rebel. If this is the ethics which is to prevail, then we have more judgments in store for the nation.

We think the Government ought in justice to the race to provide for their obtaining farms at such prices, and on such terms as would enable our people in a reasonable time to have a home of their own, on which they might hope to earn a living, and educate their children.

From *WITNESS FOR FREEDOM*, edited by C. Peter Ripley.

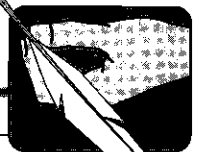
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## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

1. Why did Childress think freedmen faced a gloomy future?
2. Why did he view both the state and federal governments as oppressors of freedmen?
3. **Identifying Alternatives** What alternatives did he suggest to the presidential Reconstruction plan?

## Tenement Factories

### PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY



The following article appeared in the September 26, 1874, edition of the *New York Sun*, one of the most popular newspapers of the time. It describes a tenement sweatshop that employers established in New York City to undermine unionized factories. By the 1870s about 7,000 men, women, and children were working and living in tenement factories making cigars.

#### *Pestilence in the Cigar*

The Bohemian Quarter of New York is on the east side. . . . The . . . cigarmakers' tenement [factories] are mostly within those limits. . . . These houses are usually twenty-five feet by fifty, and so the lighted rooms are as a rule ten by ten feet in area. The dark room. . . is barely six feet square at the utmost. . . In these houses, when full, as they usually are, will be found at least 100 workers.

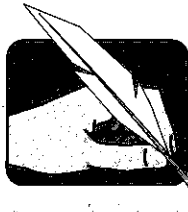
Entering the narrow hall, . . . the olfactories are at once startled by a pungent odor, so strong in some instances as to make a sensitive person sneeze "on sight," or rather "on smell." This is, of course, from the tobacco. . . . It was said that in cold weather the odor was so overpowering and pungent, doors and windows being closed, that persons unaccustomed thereto were compelled to shut their eyes in pain. Yet about four thousand people eat, cook and sleep, as well as work, in these places. Young children fall asleep from the narcotic effects of the pervading odor. Women suffer greatly from it, especially in diseases peculiar to the sex. It is also a prolific source of eye diseases.

A number of principal cigar manufacturers have taken to hiring these tenements and subletting them to their employees, who are therefore compelled to live in the same place and atmosphere as that in which they work.

The occupation of tenements for this purpose began about three years ago, but until this year there were not over half a dozen so occupied. The system is growing rapidly. With employers merely governed by avarice, this is no wonder, when the profits are considered.

### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

1. How does the author view the cigar workers? What is his attitude toward their employers?
2. Why do you think so many workers were forced to work in tenement factories? Why didn't they look for jobs in unionized craft workshops?
3. What do you think the title of the article means? What "pestilence" is the writer describing?

**PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY**

## New York Gangs

Jacob A. Riis, a Danish immigrant who came to the United States at the age of 21, was a social reformer and a reporter for the *New York Sun*, one of the most popular newspapers of its day. The excerpt below is from *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis's vivid indictment of tenement life in New York City.

*As you read, compare the reasons young people joined gangs in the 1880s with the reasons they join gangs today.*

**T**he gang is an institution in New York. The police deny its existence while nursing the bruises received in nightly battles with it that tax their utmost resources. The newspapers chronicle its doings daily, with a sensational minuteness of detail that does its share toward keeping up its evil traditions and inflaming the ambition of its members to be as bad as the worst. The gang is the ripe fruit of tenement-house growth. It was born there, endowed with a heritage of instinctive hostility to restraint by a generation that sacrificed home to freedom, or left its country for its country's good. . . . New York's tough represents the essence of reaction against the old and the new oppression, nursed in the rank soil of its slums. Its gangs are made up of the American-born sons of English, Irish, and German parents. They reflect exactly the conditions of the tenements from which they sprang. . . .

Such is the genesis of New York's gangs. Their history is not so easily written. It would embrace the largest share of our city's criminal history for two generations back, every page of it dyed red with blood. . . . Bravado and robbery are the real purposes of the gangs; the former prompts the attack upon the policeman, the latter that upon the citizen. Within a single week last spring, the newspapers recorded six murderous assaults on unoffending people, committed by

young highwaymen in the public streets. How many more were suppressed by the police, who always do their utmost to hush up such outrages "in the interests of justice," I shall not say. There has been no lack of such occurrences since, as the records of the criminal courts show. . . .

From all this it might be inferred that the New York tough is a very fierce individual, of indomitable courage and naturally as bloodthirsty as a tiger. On the contrary he is an arrant coward. His instincts of ferocity are those of the wolf rather than the tiger. It is only when he hunts with the pack that he is dangerous. Then his inordinate vanity makes him forget all fear or caution in the desire to distinguish himself before his fellows, a result of his swallowing all the flash literature . . . he can beg, borrow, or steal—and there is never any lack of them—and of the strongly dramatic element in his nature that is nursed by such a diet into rank and morbid growth. He is a queer bundle of contradictions at all times. . . . Fighting his battles with the coward's weapons, the brassknuckles and the deadly sand-bag, or with brick-bats from the house-tops, he is still in all seriousness a lover of fair play, and as likely as not, when his gang had downed a policeman in a battle that has cost a dozen broken heads, to be found next saving a drowning child or woman at the peril of his own life.

**QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS**

1. How did Jacob Riis view the New York gangs and the young people who joined them?
2. **Making Comparisons** How do the gangs that exist in today's cities differ from the juvenile gangs of the 1880s? How are they similar?